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DELOS

STARKER

PLAYS KODALY

Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello

Duo for Violin and Cello with JOSEF GINGOLD, violin

Bottermund-Starker: Variations on a Theme by Paganini

STARKER PLAYS KODÁLY

BOTTERMUND-STARKER
1 Variations on a Theme by Paganini (5:14)

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY
Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello, Op. 8 [30:42]
2 Allegro maestoso ma appassionato (8:42)
3 Adagio (con gran espressione) (11:11)
4 Allegro molto vivace (10:40)

Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7 [25:11]
5 Allegro serioso, non troppo (7:51)
6 Adagio (8:23)
7 Maestoso e largamente, ma non troppo lento (8:40)

JANOS STARKER, Cello
JOSEF GINGOLD, Violin

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 61:30

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212 26th Street, Suite 145, Santa Monica, CA 90402
(800) 364-0645 • Fax (310) 459-5602
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www.delosmusic.com

The reputation of the Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) has rested chiefly on his role as educator, composer of choral works, and folklorist who joined his compatriot Bela Bartók in collecting Hungarian folk songs. Recent attention has focused more closely on Kodály's highly innovative compositional methods and on his instrumental writing. The chamber works written between 1905 and 1920 are a case in point. Kodály attached particular importance to his **Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello, Op. 8**, composed in 1915. At the time of its composition, the *Cello Sonata* represented the first major work for unaccompanied cello since the suites of J.S. Bach. Janos Starker recalls Kodály's prediction that his sonata would become a cornerstone of the cello repertoire. Starker was studying in Budapest at the time; Kodály apparently reported to Adolph Schiffer — Starker's first and only cello teacher and the successor to David Popper as professor at the Franz Liszt Academy — that "in 25 years no cellist will be accepted who has not played this piece."

The young Starker wholeheartedly endorsed this view and made it come to pass. In 1939 when he was 15, Starker played the work for Kodály, first privately and then in concert in Budapest. Ever a stern educator, Kodály pronounced the performance of the first movement too fast, the second movement "okay", and the third movement containing too much separation between the variations. When Starker settled permanently in the United States in 1948 he had further opportunities to play the Cello Sonata for Kodály during the composer's conducting tours abroad. The two met in Bloomington, Indiana where Starker had been appointed Professor of Cello at Indiana University, in London, and again in the U.S. where, shortly before Kodály's death in 1967, he told Starker: "If you correct the ritard in the third movement, it will be the Bible performance."

The mastery Starker achieved had already displayed itself in several recordings. Starker's recording of the Kodály Cello Sonata was a first. It took place in Paris in 1948 and appeared on 78 rpm. In this first recorded performance Starker made certain cuts in the second and third movements, partly because the sonata was too long for the eight sides and partly because at this time Starker felt that a passage of arpeggiation in the third movement was "too plaintive and stopped the action." The Paris recording received the *Grand Prix du Disque,* thereby identifying Kodály's Sonata as a Starker signature piece. In 1950 in New York City Starker went on to make the first LP recording of the

work. This time he restored the cuts in the second movement but continued to omit the arpeggiation in movement three. A third recording, done in London in 1956, used the version of the Sonata identical to that featured on the New York LP. During the same year the Sonata was included for the first time as an obligatory work in the Mexico City Casals Competition. From this time forward, the work took its place as a masterpiece in the cello repertory.

Starker's fourth and final recording, produced in Japan in 1970, restored the omission from movement three. Delos' digital transfer of the Japan recording to compact disc therefore marks Starker's first and only recording of the complete version of Kodály's Cello Sonata. It also comprises the work's first appearance on compact disc.

Six years after its composition, the originality of Kodály's Sonata for Unaccompanied Cello was noted by Bela Bartók in an article entitled "The New Music of Hungary." "No other composer has written music that is at all similar to this type of work," wrote Bartók. ". . . Here Kodály is expressing, with the simplest possible technical means, ideas that are entirely original. It is precisely the complexity of the problem [i.e. the challenge of writing a work for solo cello] that offered him the opportunity of creating an original and unusual style, with its surprising effects of vocal type; though quite apart from these effects the musical value of the work is brilliantly apparent."

Starker certainly corroborates Bartók's view, adding that the Kodály Sonata is a milestone in its development of cello playing: "The first cornerstone of the cello repertoire were the Bach suites. The second important change came with Debussy who introduced pizzicato and harmonics. Kodály uses the cello from top to bottom. All the fingers are busy. Three fingers are playing melodic ideas while the others are plucking chords. The use of the thumb is also highly inventive. Ponticello [bowing very close to the bridge] is a new technique on the cello . . . And the limitless and extended use of the instrument's tonal range has influenced every composer since Kodály; listen, for example, to the concerti of Hindemith, Milhaud, Prokofiev, and Shostakovich and to the cadenzas in these concerti."

In performing the Sonata, Starker's approach to tempo re-creates the Hungarian folk idiom which was the most important influence on Kodály's musical style. Two principal kinds of melodies characterize Kodály's instrumental writing, and have their roots in Hungarian folk music and its performance: first, melodies with repetitive rhythms

and pitch patterns suggestive of Hungarian children's songs and counting-out songs (see, for example the opening staccato theme in the Sonata's third movement); second, a free improvisatory melodic style which, typically, opens with a long note occurring on an accented beat followed by a song-like motive that is developed, ornamented, and accelerated in speed.

The opening theme of the Sonata (with Kodály's varied restatements) provides the most characteristic example of the second melodic type. An improvisatory melodic line with frequent meter changes also opens the second movement. Starker explains that in performing the improvisatory lines, rubato is the key: "These are declamatory melodic lines based on the rhythms of the Hungarian language. One makes accents, stresses, and accelerandos according to the language." Throughout the Cello Sonata, Starker employs rubato — or freedom within the measure — by lengthening an important note and then making up the time. In doing so, he observes the scrupulously detailed performance directions which Kodály gave to nearly every note of the work, indicating type of accentuation, method of attack, dynamic shading, phrasing (i.e. which notes should be grouped together), etc. The listener will be struck by the near impossibility of hearing a regular pulse; the music is improvisatory, and groupings of notes often move across the bar line. (Exceptions of course are the passages suggestive of Hungarian children's songs. These are regular and easy to count.)

Starker is critical of later editions of the Cello Sonata which contain some pitches that he feels are debatable and may not have appeared in Kodály's original version. In a passage near the end of the third movement consisting of alternating G-sharp octaves (a high tessitura G-sharp alternating with the G-sharp an octave below), Starker changes the pattern of G-sharp, G-sharp, G-sharp, G-sharp to <u>G-natural, G-natural</u>, G-sharp, G-sharp: "The repeated G# lacks intensity. I move from G to G-sharp because it increases the intensity."

The **Duo for Violin and Cello, Op. 7** was composed just a year before the Cello Sonata in 1914. Both are youthful works belonging to the period 1905-1920, in which Kodály composed most of his chamber music. Like the Cello Sonata, the Duo is a highly original work: its scoring for violin and cello may well be a first, providing a likely precedent for Ravel's *Sonata for Violin and Cello* composed in 1920-22. Kodály's Duo is a fascinating display of the similar technical capabilities of violin and cello, yet the highly

contrasting tones of the two instruments. Kodály demonstrates this through imitation between the instruments, question and response, and passages in which the two blend and play as one instrument. The performance on this disc by Starker and the Russian-born Josef Gingold, both currently on the faculty of Indiana University, provides a rare opportunity to hear two of the supreme masters and pedagogues of their instruments join forces for a duo performance.

The Hungarian folk melos so important in Kodály's Cello Sonata also pervades the Duo. An example of the style of children's songs occurs in the repeated-note cello theme that opens the Presto section of the third movement. The free improvisatory melodic style is most audible in the third movement's opening bars.

The **Variations on a Theme by Paganini** are Janos Starker's transcription of variations composed by Hans Bottermund on Paganini's 24th Caprice for Violin. Born around 1860, Hans Bottermund was principal cellist of the Berlin Philharmonic and later Professor at the University of Cologne. Starker came across Bottermund's Paganini Variations when he was about twelve. He made a pencilled copy of the music and later prepared an edition containing the variations that he liked best — eight in all. He has played this set as an encore in concert but never before on recording.

Nancy Perloff

Production Coordinator:
Amelia S. Haygood

Digital Transfer:
Bejun Mehta

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Recorded: *Japan, 1978 (Bottermund-Starker); Japan, 1970 (Sonata, Op. 8); Indiana University, 1973 (Duo, Op. 7)*